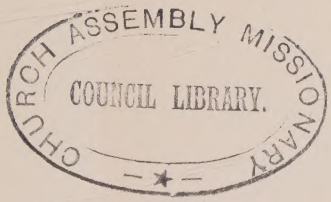
CHRISTA SEVA SANGHA

JACK C. WINSLOW.

One Shilling Net.

India



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2026

https://archive.org/details/christasevasangh0000jack

CHRISTA SEVA SANGHA.

A GROUP OF THE BROTHERS, WITH A GUEST ON THE EXTREME LEFT.

CHRISTA SEVA SANGHA

By
JACK C. WINSLOW.
(Acharya of Christa Seva Sangha.)

THE SOCIETY FOR THE PROPAGATION OF THE GOSPEL IN FOREIGN PARTS,
15 Tufton Street, Westminster, S.W. 1.

1930.

MIS/111

C67669

133360

CONTENTS.

	PAGE
Introduction	vii.
Prologue	1
Chapter	
I. Why Christa Seva Sangha was started	9
II. The History of Christa Seva Sangha	18
III. The Increase	34
IV. Christa Seva Sangha to-day	42
Epilogue	56
Appendix	60

ILLUSTRATIONS.

A group of the Brothers, with a guest on the extreme left ... ... Frontispiece

FACING PAGE

In the Court where the Brothers live ... 16

The Refectory 17

The Chapel 32

A group of Students at the C.S.S. Hostel 33

INTRODUCTION.

This short account of Christa Seva Sangha has been written at the special request of the S.P.G. We hesitated much about acceding to this request, since we are most anxious to avoid the fatal snare of self-advertisement. But after mature thought we agreed that the book should be produced; for we saw the force of the contention that the young people of the Church, for whom the book is primarily intended, ought to have the opportunity of knowing about new lines along which the Church in India is seeking to develop her work; and we also coveted greatly the help of the prayers of those who would read it. But, if the book was to be written at all, it was clear that it must be written with a good deal of vivid detail. We hope that our readers, when tempted to criticize, will bear in mind these circumstances of its origin. Sections, for instance, like that which describes the daily life in the *ashram,* would have been omitted, or differently written, in a general history of the Sangha for all classes of readers.

J.C.W.

PROLOGUE.

It is nearing sunset in the days of the great heat. The fierce ball of fire, which has blazed pitilessly in the heavens all through the long summer day, is dropping behind the Western Ghats[1]; but his power, as he glares across the hill-tops, seems still scarcely abated, and all nature pants and languishes in the stifling heat.

A long train of pilgrims from the north is approaching Poona, once the proud capital of the Maratha Empire, where they will sleep the night before continuing their long march to Pandharpur, the home of their beloved Vithoba[2] in the far south. They go on foot, men, women and children together, trusting to God and their fellow men for food and rough shelter for the night, their orange banners proclaiming them as the people of the Quest. Onwards they go, seeking, seeking; grateful now, as they near the city, for the shade of kindly trees which here join their long arms across the Pilgrim's Way: and, as they go, they sing—

"The Endless One is beyond, beyond . . . .
But between him and me there rise the lofty mountains of desire and anger.
I am not able to ascend them, nor do I find any pass."

1. The line of mountains stretching down the west coast of India.
2. The form of Vishnu's incarnation as Krishna most popular in Western India.

We stand in the shady Pilgrim's Way and watch them go. As the last passes from sight, we turn and see beside us, on the other side of a low fence, a broad open portico, surmounted by a beehive dome and cross, giving access to a large square vestibule, with walls of rubble stone and flat concrete roof, and beyond this, and stretching out on either side of it, a long building, also of rubble stone, flat-roofed, with three large windows to the right and three to the left, fitted only with rough wooden shutters.

We go in by a gate, and, passing through the portico and hall and through a large doorway at its far end, find ourselves looking down, from the top of a low flight of steps, upon an inner court, enclosed on three sides, but open on the fourth (that which faces us) to a view of trees and (in the nearer distance) the bed of a small stream dried up by the long drought. In the centre of the court is a large round tank full of clear water, infinitely refreshing to the senses in the days of heat, and around it a garden of young cypresses and orange trees, among which struts a peacock with lordly gait. On its three enclosed sides the court is flanked by a narrow verandah, along which at somewhat wide intervals stand pillars of grey concrete supporting a flat concrete roof of no great height. Doves circle around and settle on the roof.

We pass along the thin strip of verandah. On that side of the court on which we have entered there are rooms enclosed with walls and doors, but on the

other two sides the building is divided up by partitions of whitewashed sackcloth into tiny cells, with *chics* of split bamboo in place of doors, and containing for the most part a roll of bedding and a box on the stone floor, and a few books and other articles in a small recess built into the stone wall at the back of the cell.

The sun has now set, and, though the heat is not perceptibly diminished, there is a pleasant sense of refreshment from the tempering of the brilliant light. From the open garden beyond the court and the orange trees comes a sound of singing, and we pass out to listen. On a round gravelled platform, raised slightly above the surrounding ground, there is gathered a company of worshippers, sitting cross-legged round the outer rim of the platform in a semicircle facing the sunset. They are dressed lightly, as befits the days of heat, with a *dhoti,* or loin-cloth, of white homespun, and a light scarf flung over the shoulders. Some, it would seem, are the sons of the land; others strangers from the west, who have made its ways their own. In the centre of the platform sits one of the company apart, casting grains of incense from time to time upon hot cinders, from which the wreaths of incense smoke float upwards in the still air. We go forward and join ourselves to the seated worshippers, as the hymn proceeds. It is an Indian melody in the Marathi tongue, soft and plaintive, with a poignant wistfulness of appeal. One of the Brothers beats the time rhythmically with the Indian drum.

Another makes the "drone" of the melody hum out from the twang of the Indian guitar. Others clash small cymbals in time with the drum's beat. The words of the refrain, often repeated, stamp themselves quickly on the memory.

Presently the music ceases, and the leader begins to offer praise of God: "Formless and Infinite! Abyss of Wisdom! Source and Bestower of Bliss! Fount of Holiness! Ocean of Mercy! Father of tender Compassions! To thee be adoration and glory!" The stately, resounding Names—each of them a single Sanskrit compound—are soul-stirring by their very music, even for those who cannot fully comprehend them.

A brief silence, and the worship proceeds: a psalm, chanted antiphonally by leader and worshippers; a passage of Scripture; and then *Magnificat* with Indian melody and accompaniment. After this, a few brief prayers; and then, once again, with the cymbals' clash and the drum's rhythmic beat, the voices break out into a flood of sound in one of the exquisite lyrics of Narayan Vaman Tilak, the great Christian poet of Maharashtra[1]—

"Be thou at hand, O Lord;
Then, though this flesh reside
In stately palace halls
Or rugged mountain-side,
If thine unfailing presence be
About me still, all's heaven to me.

1. The name "Maharashtra" is used for all that area (practically the whole of Western India) over which the Marathi language is spoken.

Be thou at hand, O Lord;
  Then, though my board be piled
With wealth of daintiest fare
  Or bitter herbs and wild,
The whiles my spirit trysts with thee,
Thyself my nectar feast shall be.

Be thou at hand, O Lord;
  Then, though my nightly bed
On soft and fragrant flowers
  Or roughest rocks be spread,
So but I lean upon thy breast,
No breath of care shall mar my rest.

O dear and inmost soul
  Of all the joys that be,
My action, thought and speech,
Yea all, I yield to thee,
Lord Christ beloved, accept me now;
Unfailing rest alone art thou."

A hush follows the closing cadences of the hymn; and, as the leader bids all to lift their hearts to Christ, the true Light, the whole seated company softly recites together the ancient Sanskrit words which every "twice-born" Hindu learns at his investiture with the sacred thread, the *Gayatri Mantra,* by repetition of which man's spirit steadies and concentrates its vision for contemplation of the Light Eternal:—

Tat savitur varenyam bhargo devasya dhimahi!
Dhiyo yo naha prachodayāt!

Let us meditate on the excellent glory of the Divine Illuminer!

May he inspire our understanding!

A deep silence falls, broken only by the low roar of distant traffic on road and railway or the murmur of voices on the Pilgrim's Way. The flaming orange of the sunset pales slowly to amber, dimmed at times by the dust-cloud which rises from the trail of the cattle as they wend homewards at the "cow-dust" hour. The blue above deepens into purple, deepens and darkens till the first stars throb softly through. A faint breath of coolness stirs the trees. The silence deepens with the shadows; becomes pregnant; living; stealing into the heart with a touch of infinite peace. Truly this hour of twilight, consecrated from time immemorial in this land of religion to communion with the unseen, holds in it some unearthly witchery, is mistress of a holy spell. How lightly, under its solemn influence, the spirit slips from its fleshly shackles, and soars to its true home. The "unsubstantial pageant" of earth fades and dissolves into the glory of heaven. The stillness is vibrant with the sense of unseen presences—saints and angels into whose worship we have entered. From such a vantage point of vision, how small appear the cares and the pleasures of earth, how large beyond bearing its sins! How the soul, rapt in the peace of God, yet agonizes over the strifes of men, yearns for the merging of earth's discords in the heavenly harmony! . . . .

Again a low murmur of prayer, startling us with a sudden shock of recall: *Asatoma sadgamaya: tamasoma jyotirgamaya: mrityorma'mritum gamaya;*—that prayer which, repeated through unnumbered centuries, breathes the eternal yearning of India's heart for God: *"From falsehood lead me to truth: from darkness lead me to light: from death lead me to immortality."*

And then, yet softer, the slow chant—

SHĀNTI! SHĀNTI! SHĀNTI!
Peace! Peace! Peace!

CHAPTER I.

Why Christa Seva Sangha was started.

Beside the gate through which we turned in from the Pilgrim's Way in Poona stands a board marked "*Christa Seva Sangha,*" which means literally "Christ—Service—Society," that is, the Society of Servants belonging to Christ. The ground into which the gate admitted us is their *ashram*—a word which was used in ancient India to describe the forest hermitages, where the sages known as *Rishis* used to instruct their disciples in the ways of religion, and is still used to denote a home marked by a common life of simple character and a certain detachment from the world for prayer, study, or service. It may be of interest to inquire what were the reasons for starting this Society; what has been its history hitherto; and what it is attempting to do at the present time. This chapter, therefore, will deal with the two principal reasons why it was thought desirable that such a Sangha should be brought into existence: the next two will outline its career during its first eight years of infancy: the fourth will give an outline picture of the Sangha as it is to-day.

The two main purposes for which the Sangha was originally started may be summed up thus: a life of common service and equal fellowship for Indians and Europeans; and the development of Indian ways for the expression in India of Christian life and worship.

(1) *A life of common service and equal fellowship for Indians and Europeans.*

There are in India religious communities of English people sharing in a common life together, and similar communities of Indians. In Christa Seva Sangha, however, Indians and Englishmen share together in a common life on terms of complete equality.

At the great missionary conference held at Edinburgh in 1910, an Indian Christian who has now become famous as Bishop of Dornakal made an appeal to the Western Church in burning words, which have never been forgotten by those who heard them: "You have given your goods to feed the poor; you have given your bodies to be burned; now give us love!"

Too often we who go out to India from the west have been guilty of racial arrogancy and superiority. It is not only that we have readily assumed leadership in the work of the Church; for this was natural, and indeed inevitable, in the early pioneer days when the infant Church had yet everything to learn of Christ and Christian life. Our fault is that we are so apt to regard people of another colour as

essentially inferior to ourselves; and that, even though we may show them much kindness and make real sacrifices on their behalf, we too often fail to offer them the gift of real love and equal friendship. We do not think of the Indian as really a brother or a sister in Christ; and the result is a certain gulf between us, which is in truth an unnatural gulf and has no right to exist.

If we allow such a gulf as this to exist, we are being false to our whole mission. Christ said: "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another." Love, overcoming all barriers, welding into one harmonious family people of diverse race, education, class, temperament, and outlook—what a witness this would be to the love of Christ! India, torn and distracted by strifes and divisions—hindered in her advance to freedom and true nationhood by nothing so much as the rivalry between Hindu and Moslem, Brahman and non-Brahman—thirsts after the secret of unity! What price would she not pay for the medicine which could heal this cancer of disunion that saps her strength at every moment!

And we have in Christ that secret; for in him there is "No Jew or Greek, circumcision or uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond or free; ye are all one in Christ Jesus." If we could show India that the secret of love and unity is indeed in Christ, would she not fall at his feet and own him Lord? But we Christians have shown, instead, a Christendom torn into fragments; strife among the

Churches; racial pride and intolerance; the bitterness of party conflict; the spirit of caste even within the Church. No wonder India is not impressed!

The first reason, therefore, for the starting of Christa Seva Sangha was to try to contribute something towards the healing of these wounds, and especially towards the healing of inter-racial strife. In the words of its Rule, the Sangha "has within it both Indian and non-Indian members, who together form a spiritual family living on terms of perfect equality and fellowship, bearing witness to the world of the unity that is in Christ." There is no question here of missionary and Indian Christian. If missionary means ambassador of Christ, all the members of the Sangha are missionaries. If missionary means ambassador from an elder Church, none are missionaries. For "to the non-Indian members India has become their adopted motherland," and all alike, Indian and non-Indian, are simply fellow-servants of Christ and of India. The Sangha's success will depend largely on its being faithful to this ideal.

(2) *The Indian presentation of Christian life and worship.*

Let us try to picture to ourselves the mind of an educated Brahman in India to-day, as he thinks of Christianity and Christ.

He has become familiar with the Gospels during his years in a missionary college or through his own private study of them. The central figure there

depicted exercises a strange fascination over his mind. This is One whom he can understand and love. His life and teaching seem to answer to the best in India's own ideals. All he has vaguely admired and striven after is here summed up in teaching of compelling simplicity and power, and in a life that perfectly exemplifies the teaching, crowned by a supreme act of self-sacrificing love. Certainly Christ, he feels, must be regarded as a true *Avatāra*[1]! A man could not go far wrong in taking him as *guru*[2]. He turns to the Christian Church to see how it embodies and sets forth the spirit of its Master.

From the first he encounters a shock. The Christian Church, it seems, is a western institution, not intended for such as himself. He has amongst his friends a certain number of educated Indian Christians; and, though they are pleasant and friendly, they belong, he feels, to a different world from his. They dress in European fashion, and enter his house in boots. If he goes to their houses he finds that they eat meat (which makes it impossible for him to share a meal with them), and have modelled their houses and style of living on that of the west[3].

---

1. viz.: Incarnation. Hindus believe in ten principal incarnations of Vishnu, but any outstanding Mahatma ("great soul") may be an incarnation.

2. Master.

3. It should be understood that the picture here drawn would not apply universally. Many Brahmans, particularly of the younger generation, have adopted western ways; and a few educated Indian Christians live like Brahmans. The simple and illiterate Christians of the villages are not westernized.

But perhaps he should look, in forming a judgment, not to the rank and file of Christians, but to the *gurus* of the Christian Church. He would hardly seek to learn his own religion from men engaged in the ordinary professions of life, but rather from those specially dedicated to the life of religion as *sannyāsis*—those who have renounced all in the quest for God, and in their saffron robe, with staff and bowl, wander homeless, begging their bread, and instructing in spiritual truth those who come to them with the true thirst for truth in their souls.

He seeks, therefore, to discover whether there is not some Christian *sannyāsi* from whom he could learn the inner mysteries of the Christian religion; but can only hear of a famous *sannyāsi,* Sadhu Sundar Singh, whose writings do indeed move him, and of a few others of no outstanding distinction. Most of the Christian *gurus* he finds to be living lives quite unlike that of the *sannyāsi*[1].

Still persisting in his quest he goes one Sunday to see the worship at a Christian church in his town. Again he meets with disappointment. The church itself is built in English Victorian style. The congregation, clad in immaculate European clothes, are seated in pews, without having bared their feet

1. There is a well-known story of a Hindu *Sadhu* who, wishing to see the chief *guru* of the Christian religion, with a view to refuting his errors, was directed to Bishop's House, Calcutta, the residence of the Metropolitan of India. But when the Sadhu came in sight of the sumptuous episcopal mansion, he turned back home, saying, "I need not waste my time in argument. A religion whose chief *guru* lives thus can never pervert my country from the truth." It should be added that no one would be more glad to be relieved of the burden of Bishop's House than its present saintly occupant.

even in the house of God. The psalms sung to Anglican chants and the hymns to western tunes sound strangely to his ear. There is none of the Indian devotional music that he loves so well. Passages are read from the Christian scriptures; but though they are in his own language, so uncouth is the rendering that often he can make no sense of them. Prayers are offered, but suffer from a like defect[1]. He finds also no intervals of silent prayer, no opportunity for quiet worship. There is a sense of hurry and unrest. At the close is a sermon which has no bearing on those deeper philosophic questions which to him are the real problems of life. He comes away from the church sure that his own instinct of worship can find no satisfaction within it. He returns, with a sense of relief and deepened appreciation, to his own quiet times of prayer and contemplation in the morning before daybreak, when he meditates on some passage from the *Gitā*[2] and chants the poems of Tukārām[3].

Thinking on all these things, he comes to one plain conclusion in his mind. He will retain his reverence for Christ and try to follow his teaching, but he will never think of accepting baptism. How can he become one of this strange company with their strange ways? That would be to denationalize

1. The following is an exact rendering of the address to God at the beginning of a Marathi collect:—"O God, thou art amazing amidst the strength of thy holies."

2. The *Bhagavadgita*, or Song of the Adorable One—the most popular Hindu scripture.

3. The favourite poet-saint of Maharashtra.

himself, to be false to his motherland in this day when most of all she needs the loyalty of her sons. It would mean the denial of his own splendid heritage of spiritual truth. He would be asked to surrender his own culture, to dress in uncouth ways and perhaps even to eat beef! No, he would rather live and die a faithful Hindu, and he can honour Christ without submitting to this surrender of the things he holds most dear.

The above picture is typical of the attitude of large numbers of educated Hindus at the present day. There are many things which prevent them from seeing Christ in all his compelling beauty. Outstanding among these is the unchristian lives of us who bear his Name. But not the least among them is the western disguise in which we have hidden him. To use Sundar Singh's simile, we offer the water of life to India in a western cup, and India will not drink.

A second reason, therefore, for the starting of Christa Seva Sangha was to help in developing the true Indian expression of Christian life and worship. What could be better for this purpose than a community of Indian and European Christians, living and worshipping together? For the task is twofold. On the one hand that which is fundamental, universal in Christianity—the great Catholic heritage of the Church—must be preserved; for this is the gift which all men need. Here the English Brothers of the Sangha can play the leading part. On the other hand, much of

THE COURT WHERE THE BROTHERS LIVE.

THE REFECTORY.
The Brothers sit on the low stools.

what is accidental, temporary, local in western Christianity must be shed, and replaced by its true Indian counterpart. In fashioning this the Indian Brothers must take the lead. The chapters which follow will show, in greater detail, some of the ways in which this little community is seeking, without surrendering its catholicity, to be truly Indian, that it may play its part, however small, in building by God's grace the Indian Catholic Church.

CHAPTER II.

The History of Christa Seva Sangha.

(1) *The planting.*

Christa Seva Sangha was not the fruit of man's planning or man's wisdom. It came "by revelation of God." On August 12th, 1919, as the present Acharya[1] of the Sangha was sitting in the garden of a quiet country vicarage during a period of furlough in England, something in his reading turned his thoughts to the need of a Christian *ashram* in India; and immediately, like an imperious voice, came the picture of that which must be brought into being. Nor was it merely an outline picture, but one complete with many detailed features which during the years that followed have been gradually brought to realization.

But it was not until nearly three years later that the Sangha was actually started. Its inauguration took place on St. Barnabas' Day, 1922, in the church of St. Barnabas at Miri (a small out-station of the S.P.G. Ahmadnagar Mission); and the members chose as their patron saint from the first

1. viz.: The head of the community, chosen every three years by the members themselves.

St. Barnabas, the Son of Consolation, who sold his land for the poor, to whom at a later date was added St. Francis, the Little Poor Man of Assisi, who for Christ's sake espoused the Lady Poverty.

The first Brothers were a small group, six in number, of whom five were Indians. Of these five one had already adopted the saffron robe of the *sannyāsi,* and for some years past had journeyed on foot from place to place, preaching Christ, and depending for food and lodging on those who heard him.

The constitution, approved by the bishop, was in its earliest form short and simple, designed purposely in such a way as to leave room for indefinite expansion and modification with the growth of experience. Yet it contained in germ all, or nearly all, of what has since been developed. The Brothers set before themselves, first and foremost, *bhakti,* viz. "devotion" to our Lord, giving to prayer in particular the primary place in their lives. Side by side with prayer was to go the study of the holy Scriptures and other forms of subsidiary study. And, further, their lives were to be marked by two forms of service to their fellow men; the first, ministry to the sick and suffering and all in need; the second, the endeavour to show to others, by word and life, something of the beauty of that Christ who had come to mean so much to them in their own experience. The life was to be a life of poverty. None of the Brothers was to possess anything of his own. Like the first

Christians they would have all things in common. Whatever they possessed or might get must be put into the common fund, and from this they would receive only the bare necessities of life.

One of the first Brothers was a married man; yet he, and his wife, were ready to live the same life of poverty and sharing, and were given a tiny house adjoining that in which the rest of the Brothers lived[1].

From the first the Brothers set out to live in simple Indian style. They were allotted, as their head-quarters, a small house in the mission compound at Miri. It contained no furniture. The Brothers, like most of the poor in India, made use of the ground whether for sitting or lying. At night they would unroll their small rolls of bedding on the verandah. The food at first—it is always cheapest in the villages—cost only five annas (about sixpence) a day per head. It was purely vegetarian, consisting of *chapatis* or *bhakers* (cakes of unleavened wheat or millet, rolled out like pancakes), green vegetables, rice and lentils, oil and *ghi* (clarified butter). Their dress was a long cassock-like robe, similar in shape to the saffron dress of the Hindu *sannyāsi,* but made of white home-spun and home-woven cloth called *khaddar,* and girded with a saffron girdle. In the probationary stage—that of *mumukshu* or postulant—a simple *dhoti* and shirt were worn. The distinctive

1. For an account of the later development of the "Third Order," see page 40.

habit marked a definite acceptance under the rule into the position of *sādhak* or novice. The Brother who had already pledged himself to the life of a *sannyāsi* continued to wear the full saffron dress, and it was decided that this colour—always associated in India with complete renunciation and dedication to the life of religion—would be the mark of those Brothers who should hear the call (as it was hoped that many would in due course come to hear it) to a life wholly dedicated to our Lord in the unmarried state.

The Brothers wore no shoes. Indoors, they went barefoot; outside, sandals were worn.

From the first there was present in the Brothers' minds the vision of a body of Christian *sannyāsis*, whether Indian or European of race, who might help in showing to India the true beauty of Christian life in the way that India can best understand. For India, though she has seen much of the pomp and magnificence of great monarchs, has ever reserved her deepest reverence for those who, for love of God and thirst after the true spiritual riches, abandon all that they possess and live in utter poverty, making the whole world their home; and surely it would be from such that India would learn most readily of Christ? "When you bring Christ to us," said a great Hindu, "bring him to us not as a civilized European, but as an Asiatic ascetic, whose wealth is communion and whose riches are prayers."

Nevertheless the Brothers, in looking to the growth of a body of Christian *sannyāsis,* knew that in two respects at least the Christian *sannyāsi* must seek to show to India a new type of renunciation. For, in the first place, in India the two ideals of renunciation and service have too often been kept distinct. Those who have been most active in service have not been those who followed the way of asceticism. The life of the *sannyāsi,* dedicated to the religious quest, has too often been a life of spiritual luxury, without profit to the community. But the Christian *sannyāsi,* unless he is to be false to the spirit of his Master, must clearly be foremost, not only in renunciation, but also in humble ministry to his fellow men. He must cut away from him all the fetters and entanglements of the world, not that he may save his own soul, but that he may be free for the service of others.

In one other respect, too, must a new note be sounded by Christian asceticism in India. According to Hindu theory, matter and material things are evil. The world is a place of evil, to be escaped by him who would find God. The Christian asks, not to be taken out of the world, but only to be kept from its evil. To him renunciation is not escape from life, but fullness of life and joy. St. Francis and his followers, having espoused the Lady Poverty, went singing through the world, finding it filled with beauty, hardly able to contain their merriment. This is the joyous outlook which the Brothers of Christa Seva Sangha set also before

them. And it was in full accord with this that they had from the first married people in close association with them, and learnt to look on the unmarried state not (with Hindus) as a state in itself higher than the married, but only as a state to which, for special purposes of service, God might call some among his children.

The worship of the Brothers was marked from the first by some characteristically Indian features. Their eucharistic liturgy, which received the sanction of the episcopal synod of India, follows the model of eastern rather than western liturgies, and is specially akin to the Syriac liturgy of St. James, which for some centuries has been in use among the Syrian Christians of Travancore, who form the original Christian Church of the land.

Further, in India the hours of morning and evening twilight, known as *sandhyā,* or "joints" of the night and day, have from early days been set apart for prayer; and one of the most characteristic features of the Brothers' life has always been the observance of these two times of prayer, when they assemble in the open air and sit in a semicircle, facing in the morning towards the deepening glory of the sunrise, and in the evening towards the slow fading sunset.

Emphasis has been laid, in the Brothers' worship, on such ancient Christian ceremonies as naturally appeal to the heart of India. Examples of this (though not all have been in use from the first) are the procession of lights at Candlemas and

of palms on Palm Sunday; the beautiful ceremony of the feet washing on Maundy Thursday and the torchlight procession on Good Friday to the Stations of the Cross.

The beautiful Marathi lyrics of Narayan Vaman Tilak and other poets, sung to the appropriate Indian melodies and instrumental accompaniment, have always formed the Brothers' songs of praise. These have been freely used also in the work of preaching in the villages, which has presently to be described.

Two final points must be noticed as having been clearly in the Brothers' minds from the beginning. They have sought to put in the first place *the living of the Christian life rather than the doing of any particular work*. They have been well content to have no money with which to start schools or other institutions, since these often absorb so much of the missionary's time that he has little opportunity left, either for the proper maintenance of his own life of prayer, or for quiet unhurried intercourse with those who come to him for guidance. How many an enquirer after truth has turned away disappointed, because the overworked missionary could not spare the time needed for leisurely discussion of religious problems. The Brothers have tried to avoid the snare of the multiplication of organizations.

And, in the second place, the Sangha *has never desired to force people into becoming Christians*. It has been ready at all times to speak of Christ to

those really desirous of hearing, but it has not lightly blazoned abroad the deeper mysteries of the faith. This is also in full accord with Indian ideas. India understands well the saying of the Master: "Cast not your pearls before swine"—that there is a rightful principle of economy in imparting religious truth. Sundar Singh once said to the present writer, "Do not build your *ashram* too near the city. Remember that those who are thirsty will go to the river: the river need not go to them. If there is a somewhat tedious trudge required in order to reach your *ashram,* it will be all to the good; for it will sift your visitors for you, discouraging those who would come from mere curiosity, but not deterring those really in search of guidance." The Brothers have always stood for the principle underlying this advice.

Such, then, were some of the ideals and aims with which Christa Seva Sangha entered on its existence in the Year of Grace 1922.

(2) *The day of small things.*

The first four years of the Sangha's life (1922-26) were not marked by any striking advance. These were the days of quiet testing, calling for much faith and patience, when men scoffed at the new fad, and at times the little flame that had been lit seemed likely to flicker out. They were the days, too, of true poverty, when cheap and scanty fare had sometimes to be eaten, and often the Brothers wondered how funds would be forthcoming, and

gained ever fresh experience of God's providing care.

The work of the Sangha during these years was carried on, in no small measure, among the villages of the Ahmadnagar district. This brief history of Christa Seva Sangha would be incomplete unless it contained a few sketches of this work. Here is one such sketch.

The scene is Karanji, a village twelve miles from Miri, where the Sangha had birth. The Brothers are living in a tent pitched under a tree outside the village. At a distance are other tents where two women missionaries of the S.P.G. and a few Indian women helpers are also encamped. It is the day on which the outcastes of the village are to be received as catechumens of the Christian Church. These poor folk—scantily fed and clad; living in wretched hovels *outside* the village; servants and scavengers to the villagers, but not allowed to enter their houses and temples nor to drink of the village well—had sent, time and again, urgent petitions that a teacher might be sent to them to instruct them in the Christian faith and admit them into the Christian Church. To the petitions no response could be given. It was the old story—many places asking for teachers, and too few teachers to go round. So they had to wait; and the waiting had been some test of their sincerity.

At last the way had opened, and for a fortnight the Brothers and the women workers had encamped among them, teaching them night after night,

when their day's work was done, the simple elementary principles of Christian faith and life, which catechumens must know. There followed a few weeks' interval; and, when their teachers returned to complete their instruction for the catechumenate, they were confronted with the leaders of the outcaste community from four neighbouring villages, begging that their people also might be received into the Christian fold. Here was an encouraging sign of true zeal; for the live Christian is always a missionary, and these outcaste folk, even before they were catechumens, had been telling their friends of Christ.

So there were then four new villages to be instructed, and the teaching of the Karanji folk themselves to be completed; and, when the day for receiving them arrived, there was a goodly company ready to take the first decisive step in the new life.

They are gathered that morning—men, women, and children—in an open space beside their own rough-and-tumble houses. One of the leaders, a strong burly fellow, comes forward of his own accord, and with the approval of the whole company hews down with an axe the idol which from time immemorial has received the homage of these outcastes. His reign of fear is over, and his fragments are cast into an old well.

Next the women come forward, bringing the earthen pots in which they have been accustomed to cook the flesh of animals dying of disease in the village, whose carcases these outcastes must remove

and are glad to eat. It is well that this horrid custom should be abandoned by them, even at some sacrifice, when they become Christians; and the women cast their pots on the ground and break them, in token that they will henceforth abandon the eating of carrion flesh.

Then one by one the many families come forward—father, mother, and children—and, expressing their belief in Christ and their readiness to follow him, are received with prayer as catechumens—the stage of probation before admission to the full Christian life. Following an old custom of the Church (and how far more eloquently often these old symbols seem to speak to India than to the sophisticated west!), they show their renunciation of the old life and its evils by taking salt into their mouths to cleanse them, spitting it out upon the ground with all the mouth's impurities. There follows an exhortation to faithfulness in the new life. Prayers are offered; *bhajans*[1] are sung; and then the whole company passes in procession amongst the people's dwellings. Each house is blessed in the Name of Christ, and in the small recess in the wall which housed the Hindu idol is set instead a picture of Christ Crucified. Finally, outside, over the doorway, is painted in white the sign of the cross, in token that henceforth in that dwelling Christ alone holds sway.

The day's ceremony, so vivid and striking in its symbolism, so full of incalculable consequences for

1. Indian lyrics.

these outcaste folk, has aroused the interest of the people of the village, some of whom have witnessed it from a distance. It might have been expected that they would oppose the entry of this new religion into the outcaste quarters; but, instead, they express their joy. "We are so glad," they say, "that you have come to teach these ignorant folk. Now they will give up stealing and lying and other evil habits, and will begin to live decent lives, so that we shall be proud of them and be able to associate with them." "Come and sing your *bhajans* to *us* in the village to-night," they request, "and tell us about your Christ." The Brothers agree. They have refrained hitherto, content to visit the people in a friendly way, to give medicines to their sick folk or render them other small benefits. But they gladly accept the invitation proffered, and that night they go in full force to the village, armed with drum and cymbals and castanets.

How an Indian village delights in a *kirtan!* They will crowd around—every man, woman, and child amongst them that can possibly be there—and listen gladly into the early hours of the morning, the children gradually falling asleep on the ground or on their mothers' laps. For the *kirtan* is the Indian village equivalent of the cinema, or—shall we rather say?—the Indian "morality" of the Middle Ages, since in the Indian villages we are conscious all the time of being back in mediæval days, and the secular is one with the religious. The

kirtan is a service of song, in which the leader, partly preaching and partly intoning a kind of *recitative,* sets forth the praises of God, and in particular his doings when incarnate as Krishna or in some other form; calling from time to time upon a small choir which accompanies him to chant the songs that illustrate his theme, and gradually working up his hearers into an ecstasy of *bhakti*—of grateful and loving devotion—till they too begin to sing the names of Hari or Rama, clapping their hands in time with the cymbals, their bodies swaying rhythmically with the music.

What more natural, then, than to present the story of Christ to an Indian village by means of a Christian *kirtan?* You find an audience which, instead of being impatient if your sermon exceeds twenty minutes or your service an hour, is ready to sit all night, if you will, till the tale be done. One of the Brothers, acting as leader, tells the story of Christ. The others play the part of choir and orchestra. Largely through the means of poetry and singing is set forth God's way of redemption for fallen man, and how Christ came into the world, and lived, and died, and rose again for us—Christ, the one true Avatāra, so spotless in his moral purity, so boundless in his love, that we can rightly offer to him all our heart's devotion.

The villagers disperse, pondering the tale. "It is true," they say; "it is all quite true. The God of these Christians is better than our gods. But the ways of our fathers are good enough for us.

We are too old to change. Our sons or our grandsons must settle these new matters, when their day comes."

Two years have passed, and we are again in Karanji, late in the afternoon of Christmas Eve. A long procession of men, women, and children, dressed in clean white garments, is wending its way, with music and singing, back from the river, where all those who have received the teaching and stood the tests of the two years' catechumenate have been plunged under the waters of baptism, in speaking symbolism that they have died to sin and been raised up with Christ to newness of life. Within the large tent which serves as a church the bishop in cope and mitre is waiting to receive the newly baptized as members of the Church of Christ, and to complete their baptism by the laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost.

The confirmation over, the evening passes in *bhajans* and rejoicings; and just before midnight again the procession starts from the outcaste quarters, and with much singing and beating of drums and clashing of cymbals makes its way over the stream and through the trees to the tent church once more, where these new-born children of God's family, able now for the first time to be present throughout the Holy Mysteries, prostrate themselves in awe-struck silence in worship of the Child of Bethlehem, born to save India and all the world, while those who have been judged ready to make

their first Communion receive him to be born anew within their hearts. "You have often told us about worship," they say. "Now we have tasted it, and know."

We must not dwell more on these early years of Christa Seva Sangha, important as they were in its history. They were passed in various centres; for the Brothers had no money for land and buildings, and lodged where they could, testing various places as possible centres for their ultimate home, but always hoping that some day and somehow God might open the way for them to build their own *ashram* in Poona, the real centre of Maharashtra.

Their first home at Miri lasted for about a year. Then followed a year at Junnar, an old town fifty miles north of Poona, beautifully situated near the Western Ghats, where the C.M.S. put at their disposal an old unoccupied mission bungalow and a large field which they were able to cultivate for corn and vegetables. This was a valuable year of intensive training, but Junnar was too remote from the chief centres of life to make a suitable headquarters for the Sangha's work.

Finally, two years were passed in an old Mohammedan tomb, converted into a residence, which the Brothers rented at Ahmadnagar, the chief centre of S.P.G. work in western India; and here they assisted the mission in its pastoral and evangelistic work, coming also into much friendly contact with the Hindus and Moslems of the city. It is to these years that the baptisms at Karanji,

THE CHAPEL.

described above, belong. Another vivid recollection, dating from this period of the Sangha's history, is that of the hot weather of 1925, when, with a shade temperature of well over 100° daily, the Brothers, assisted by a small group of voluntary workers, toured through the Ahmadnagar district, conducting at each of five different centres an intensive mission, lasting for a week, for the instruction of the village Christians and the quickening of their spiritual life. One notable mark of this tour was that at every centre these poor outcaste folk (so accustomed generally to look to the missionaries for temporal help) showed their gratitude to the Brothers by themselves bringing water and firewood without charge for their use, and providing a bullock-cart to carry their cooking vessels and rolls of bedding on to the next village, whilst at one centre the whole of the food during their week's stay was supplied by one of the village Christians.

So the years passed until 1926, the *annus mirabilis* of the Sangha, when God began to give the increase.

CHAPTER III.

The Increase.

Up till 1926 the membership of Christa Seva Sangha continued almost stationary. During these first four years of its life several Indian Christians had come to stay for a while with the Brothers with a view to testing their vocation for the life, but none had stayed on to join them. Moreover, two of the first members had left. So that early in 1926 there were only the English Acharya and three Indian Brothers remaining, and many doubts were raised as to whether the venture could last much longer.

In the spring of that year the four Brothers were enabled by a small legacy of money to go on pilgrimage to the Holy Land; and, after a fortnight of unforgettable experiences at the Holy Places in Jerusalem and Bethlehem, at Nazareth and the Sea of Galilee, at Carmel and Joppa, the three Indian Brothers returned to India, while the Acharya proceeded to England for a time of furlough.

On June 7th a letter from India made it appear that the Sangha might not be able to hold together

much longer[1], and the Acharya went with a heavy heart that day to the triennial festival of the Theological College at Wells. The next morning, in the cathedral, a word of encouragement came to him from the First Lesson, "The Lord is able to give thee much more than this."

Exactly a month later the Acharya met (at their own request), in a three days' conference in London, a group of young men, mostly Oxford and Cambridge graduates and undergraduates, some of whom were thinking of going abroad as missionaries, but were feeling out after something like the manner of life and way of work for which Christa Seva Sangha was standing. At a further conference held later in the year some of this group decided definitely to throw in their lot with the Sangha. Others before long joined them. The result was that, when the Acharya returned to India early in the following year, he took with him three young Englishmen, who later in the year were followed by five more, four of whom were priests. In the meantime two new Indian Brothers had been received, so that by the close of the year 1927 the Sangha had grown to a considerable strength, both on the Indian and European side.

Not only so, but during the same period much interest had been aroused in England in the works and aims of the Sangha, and a considerable sum of money had been collected. This made it possible

1. These difficulties disappeared shortly afterwards.

for the Brothers at last to carry out their long-cherished design of buying land and establishing their *ashram* in Poona. Poona is, next to Bombay itself, the most important city in the Bombay Presidency. In the old days it was the capital of the Maratha Empire and the seat of the Peshwas. In modern times it has taken a lead in social and political advance, being associated with such distinguished names as those of Justice Ranade and G. K. Gokhale, the reformers; B. G. Tilak, the politician; and Sir Ramkrishna Bhandankar, saint and scholar. It contains the headquarters of the noble society for social reform known as "The Servants of India," and of the *Seva Sadan* (Home of Service), the equally splendid society for women's uplift, and two important homes of historical and literary research work, purely Indian in character. It is rich in colleges, containing two large and flourishing arts colleges under Indian management besides the government arts college, and also colleges of agriculture, engineering, medicine, and law, and the small beginnings of an indigenous "women's university." The students of these colleges run into several thousands, and there are no less than thirty thousand school children. Yet in so important an intellectual centre there is as yet no Christian college, nor was there, until Christa Seva Sangha arrived, even a Christian hostel for college students. Here then, with great rejoicing, the Brothers were able to secure for their *ashram,* towards the close of 1927, 5½ acres of

land, in a convenient site, a mile outside the city, and within easy reach of most of the important colleges; and on this land during the early part of the following year they built the *math*[1], beside which we have already found them engaged in the worship of the evening *sandhya*.

Something of the life and work of the *ashram* will be described in the next chapter. This chapter must conclude by noting a few points of special interest in the history of the past two years. The Brothers received, from the first, the warmest of welcomes from the other Christian bodies in Poona. In particular, the Cowley Fathers, whose splendid mission had already been established there for half a century and more, greeted them with the greatest friendliness, glad that they should undertake work more specially for students and educated non-Christians, as they themselves concentrated mainly on work for Christians. The Presbyterians, also long established in Poona, were equally warm in their welcome, and offered to share with the Sangha their hall in the city, named after the famous Scots missionary John Small, for the purpose of lectures, Bible classes, and other gatherings.

On St. Mark's Day (April 25th), 1928, the present Acharya was professed by the Bishop of Bombay as the first *Siddha*[2] of the Sangha.

---

1. The *ashram* is the whole enclosure of 5½ acres. The *math* (pronounced *mutt*) is the "monastery" or "cloister" within it where the Brothers live.

2. This title for a professed member has now been altered to *Sannyāsi*. The two stages on the way to full membership are those of *mumukshu* or postulant, and *sādhak* or novice. (See above, page 20.)

Early in June of that year the Brothers were able to enter into occupation of the *math*[1], which, as now completed, has room for thirty Brothers and guests.

On St. Barnabas' Day (June 11th), six years from the Sangha's birth, a revised and enlarged Rule, better suited to the new conditions, came into operation. The most important change introduced was that of distinguishing between the two classes of members of the Sangha, viz. the First Order, of unmarried members who set before themselves a life dedicated to our Lord under the conditions of poverty, chastity, and obedience, and the Third Order, of householders, working in close association with them, but living under a less strict rule adapted to the conditions of married life; and it is hoped that in due course a Second Order, consisting of Sisters living in poverty, chastity, and obedience, may come into being. By this change Christa Seva Sangha came deliberately into the succession of the religious orders of Christendom, whose life has always centred around the "evangelical counsels." In *spirit* the Sangha has more in keeping with the Franciscan Order than with any other. In the *ordering of its life,* while it maintains a strict round of prayer and discipline, it goes back in some respects behind the Benedictine tradition to the freer type of monasticism associated with St. Basil and the East.

1. Some of the cells, and also the reception hall in front of the *math,* were completed later. The greater number of the cells are little rooms, 6-ft. by 8-ft., with canvas partitions, as described in the prologue.

Another feature of the revised Rule—a change of form rather than of substance—was the use of the names of the three traditional Indian "paths," the *bhaktimārga,* or way of devotion, the *dnyānamārga,* or way of knowledge, and the *karmamārga,* or way of works, as indicating the three ways of prayer, sacred study, and active ministry, by which the Servants of Christ seek to render him their service.

The name of St. Francis was also at this stage formally added to that of St. Barnabas as the second Patron Saint of the Sangha, though the Brothers had, even before this, begun to hold in special esteem and affection the Little Poor Man of Assisi.

On Michaelmas Day (September 29th), 1928, the Bishop of Bombay visited the *ashram* and blessed all the buildings contained in it, viz. the *math* itself, and also the library, refectory and common room, the kitchen and the married quarters[1]. He dedicated, but did not consecrate, the temporary chapel in the large upper room over the library, refectory, and common room; for it is the hope of the Brothers that some day they may be able to build with their own hands a noble permanent church, of Indian design, embodying the ideals for which they stand.

In the following month a small hostel for college students was opened in two rented bungalows half a mile from the *ashram*. Two of the Brothers were put in charge, and no difficulty has been found in filling all the available space with students—

1. A guest house was added later.

Christian, Hindu, and Moslem. The work and life of the hostel are described in the next chapter.

Early in 1929 the Sangha suffered the loss of its first Visitor, Bishop Palmer, whose wise counsel and constant encouragement had been of immense value during the early years of its existence. In his place the *sabha*[1] elected Bishop Azariah of Dornakal (the first Indian Bishop of the Anglican Communion) to be their Visitor, confident that out of his wide experience and inside knowledge of Indian conditions he would be especially capable of guiding the development of the life and work of the Sangha as a truly Indian community. He was received by the Brothers as their Visitor in the *ashram* chapel on November 4th.

In this year also a further revision of the Rule was made, and, amongst other changes, the conception of the Third Order was greatly enlarged so as to include not only those working in close association with the First Order in Poona, but also men and women, married and unmarried, who have the ideals of Christa Seva Sangha at heart, and who will labour, both by word and example, to promote the spread of the knowledge of Christ, simplicity of living, and the brotherhood of all mankind.

During these years the membership of the Sangha, both Indian and European, continued by God's blessing to grow, and by March, 1930, had

1. The *sabha* is the "chapter" of all the Brothers, which is the Sangha's governing body that directs its work and policy. The Visitor exercises a general supervision, and helps by his advice.

reached to twenty, these being divided fairly equally between the two races.

One final event, only indirectly connected with the Sangha, may complete this outline history. On March 1st, 1930, the Church of England in India finally entered upon that freedom from the State for which she had fought so long, and became simply the Church of India. The Sangha cannot but rejoice in the breaking of these shackles which bound the Church to which it belongs, since it opens the way for that Church to develop her life and worship, without undue hindrance from the west, in the ways best suited to India, and in accordance with her own proper genius.

CHAPTER IV.

Christa Seva Sangha to-day.

We have seen something of the reasons why Christa Seva Sangha was started, and of its history during the first eight years of its life. We must now try to picture the Sangha as it is to-day.

(1) *A day at the* ashram.

The *ashram* is the Sangha's home. It sums up in itself all that the Sangha stands for. It is intended to be much more than a centre for the Brothers' work. The ideal of the *ashram* is that it should be a holy place, instinct with the spirit of love, joy and peace, a place where God is felt to be. Unless in some real measure it breathes this atmosphere, it will fail of its purpose, and the Sangha will fail with it.

The *ashram* is a home of peace. We have listened already, as the darkness gathered round the worship of the evening *sandhya,* to the soft closing benediction, *shānti, shānti, shānti*—the word that speaks so movingly to the Indian soul of the deep tranquillity which the storms of life cannot ruffle—that "peace of God which passeth all

understanding." That closing word of the *sandhya* ushers in the greater silence, which lasts until the next day's meditation is over. The Brothers rise from the *sandhyāsthān*[1] and walk in silence in the gathering darkness to the refectory, where the simple evening meal of rice and lentils is served, two of the Brothers acting as the servers appointed for the day and one as lector to read aloud during the meal.

A period for private reading follows, varying from one hour to two according to the time of year (for the time of *sandhya* and the evening meal changes with the sunset); and then shortly before nine o'clock the bell sounds, and the Brothers repair to their chapel in the upper room for the closing prayer of the day. A long room, austere and unadorned. At its eastern end stands a simple altar, with red hangings and frontal, and on it a brass cross bearing a small figure of Christ in the likeness of a *rishi*[2]—the work of an Indian brass-smith in the Poona bazaar. At the ends of the altar are two *samayas*—brass stands expanding at the top into a saucer containing *ghi*[3], around which project seven lighted wicks of cotton. Before the sanctuary hang three brass sanctuary lamps, also of Poona workmanship, the central lamp being now lit, the others only for festal services. On the walls are hung a few pictures, including two of great beauty by a

1. The place of *sandhya*, viz.: the round raised platform described in the prologue.

2. An Indian sage.

3. Clarified butter.

young Indian Christian artist, and one of Christ, the *Sannyāsi,* painted by a Hindu. A figure of Christ upon the Cross meets the eye on entering. The chapel is bare of seats. (The Brothers sit on the floor for quiet prayer and meditation, and for hearing addresses or the reading of Scripture. Their other two attitudes of prayer, in accordance with universal eastern custom, are standing and prostration, the latter particularly having a large place at the eucharistic worship.)

One by one the Brothers enter, having put off their sandals, and leaving outside, or turning low, the lanterns which they carry at night for safety against snakes and scorpions. The *samayas* sparkle on the altar, the cross gleaming in their light; the central sanctuary lamp shines with a red glow above; the rest of the chapel is in dimness. The office of compline follows. It is used almost unchanged (except for its Marathi setting and the Indian tunes for the hymn and *Nunc Dimittis*); for it has endeared itself to Indian as it has to western Christians. At its close the Acharya, standing at the altar, turns to the Brothers, and, holding up in his hand a brass cross, blesses them with it three times, using the beautiful words of the "Prayer of the Protection"[1] from the compline service of the Syrian Christians. It is the Master's own blessing of peace and protection for the night. The lights on the altar are put out. By the dim glow of the hanging lamp can be seen silent figures, lingering

1. See Appendix.

on in prayer. Then, one by one, the Brothers return to their cells, where in a little while the mats are unrolled on the floor, the lanterns turned low, and sleep reigns in the court of the *math,* while the silent stars keep sentinel.

The *ashram* is a home of prayer. Of the three ways by which the Brothers seek to serve our Lord, prayer is the first and chiefest, and the whole day's course is punctuated with the fixed times of prayer. The Sangha has adopted the traditional hours of Christian monastic devotion, but it is seeking to develop a type of "office" which shall be better suited to the Indian religious temperament than those of the west.

"Very early, while it is yet dark," the rising bell sounds, and one of the Brothers passes slowly down the whole length of the cloister, singing a morning *bhajan,* the others joining in as the cantor passes their cells. A short form of prime, opening with some of the rising prayers of the Hindus adapted to Christian use[1], is said by the Brothers in their cells; and, half an hour later, as the first light is dawning in the eastern sky, they gather in the open air for the morning *sandhyā,* a kind of Indian lauds, or prayer of the dawn, answering to the evening *sandhyā,* or vespers, of the sunset.

By the time this ends daylight has come, and the sun is almost rising; so to the singing of the ancient hymn, "Now that the daylight fills the

1. See Appendix.

sky," the Brothers pass in procession to the chapel, where the Holy Mysteries are daily celebrated in accordance with the moving Indian rite that from the first they have had permission to use[1]. On Sundays and Holy Days they use the full service with music and incense, and the beautiful *shānti-wandan,* or "Salutation of Peace," passed from Brother to Brother down the chapel; and the service is also on these days preceded by the *udak-shanti* (literally the "water-peace"), a beautiful Indian form of the *Asperges,* the priest sprinkling the people with holy water with a rose or some other flower.

The Holy Eucharist is followed by breakfast in the refectory—a room adorned with pictures of Indian saints and patriots. This meal is eaten in silence; and then, after an interval for sweeping and dusting the cells[2], the Brothers re-assemble for a brief office of terce, followed by a period of meditation. In the religious life of Hinduism *dhyāna* (contemplation) occupies so important a place that any Christian community which seeks to appeal to the soul of India must be, at least in some measure, contemplative. Unless the Church can produce great Christian *Yogis*—masters in the spiritual life, who are competent to direct others in

1. See page 23. This Indian liturgy is published by Messrs. Longmans and Co., under the title, "An Order for the administration of Holy Communion sanctioned by the Episcopal Synod of India for experimental use in the Diocese of Bombay." (2s. 6d.)

2. The Brothers do all their own housework, but have as yet found none of their own number able to undertake the cooking, so a paid cook is employed.

the discipline and science of the mystical way—she will fail to attract the choicest spirits of Hinduism. It is difficult, therefore, to exaggerate the importance of the time set apart for meditation and contemplation in the life of the *ashram*. Each of the Brothers receives guidance and help in the spiritual life from his *guru*, or director, who is either the Acharya or someone appointed by him.

But the *ashram* is also a home of study. The time of meditation over, the greater silence comes to an end. The rest of the morning is given up to study; and, in order to insure silence for this purpose, the rule of the lesser silence is enforced till midday, forbidding idle conversation but allowing speech in connection with work or study. Every Brother is expected to give at least one hour daily to study, and some—particularly those reading for holy orders—have many hours to put in. Lectures are delivered regularly by those Brothers who are qualified to give them, the course including the subjects usually taken by ordination candidates and the study of Indian religion. Some of the Brothers are engaged in various forms of literary work;—one on a book on Canarese literature, another translating lives of the saints into Hindi, another making researches in Indian mysticism, several writing articles on Christianity for publication in non-Christian papers.

At midday, after the saying of the *Angelus*, comes a brief office of sext, followed by intercessions which vary from day to day. After this is the

principal meal of the day—*chapatis* and vegetable curry, rice and lentils, and curds. The Brothers (dressed now in *dhotis* and little more) sit cross-legged in the Indian fashion on little square wooden stools, just raised off the floor. They eat with their fingers from brass plates tinned on the inner side. Each takes his turn in serving. Already the Brothers have almost overflowed their small refectory. When, as frequently happens, one or two guests are present, accommodation is taxed to the uttermost. At times some of the Brothers have to feed on the verandah outside.

It is a strangely mixed company, judged by origin—European, Australian, and Indian; Brahman and Lingayat; caste and outcaste; Englishmen from college and from primary schools; Indians brought up in the English language, and Indians to whom English is a sealed book. Yet all these differences are forgotten utterly, swallowed up in an all-pervading sense of a family made one in Christ.

Conversation runs high, and you may hear Marathi and English, Urdu and Hindi, Tamil and Canarese, all spoken at one and the same time; but the babel seems to help, rather than hinder, the building of a tower "whose top shall reach unto heaven."

The two hours of the early afternoon, following this meal, are left at the Brothers' own disposal, to write letters (it may be) or to read, to sleep or to swim in the tank. The later afternoon, following

none and an early tea, is the part of the day more specially devoted to *karmamārga,* the "way of works." Some of these works are outside the *ashram* and others within. Always a number of the Brothers go out at this time for various bits of service. There are the poor to be visited, or a sick man or woman to be taken to hospital. Once a week a small group goes off to the leper asylum, six miles distant, to cheer its unfortunate inmates with gossip and singing, and to tell them of Christ who cared for the lepers. Other Brothers have as their charge the visiting of prisoners, Indian and European, in the gaol, or of the patients in the hospital. A monthly service of intercession for the sick is also held, and many have been helped at this time through the laying on of hands with prayer.

Sometimes there is a class to be taken, or a lecture delivered, at the John Small Hall in the city or at the Brothers' own hall at the *ashram.* The numbers on these occasions are usually small; but for some lectures—notably those of Dr. Stanley Jones in 1929—the hall has been packed to overflowing. The Bible classes held there have attracted a small but keen group. Or the special call of the evening may be a meeting or inter-communal dinner of the International Fellowship—a movement (started by a leading Indian Christian in Madras, and now spreading to various other centres in India) which seeks to break down religious, racial, and social barriers, and to deepen the spirit of co-operation and brotherhood. Other

"works" are done within the *ashram* itself. In particular, there will always be, at this hour of the day, some of the Brothers engaged upon the work of the garden, where it is hoped in due course to produce all the fruit and vegetables needed for the Sangha's use. Visitors in plenty come to the *ashram* at this and at other times. Some of them are little more than interested sightseers, but many are seekers after truth, eager to know what the dwellers in this *ashram* have found, and what they have to tell. Hindus, Moslems, Jains, Buddhists, Jews, Parsees, Brahmo-Samajists, politicians, monks and ascetics, editors and journalists, social reformers and professors, Indian and European Christians—all manner of people enter by the gate; and the Brothers can perform no more useful function than in seeking, through the intercourse of friendship, both to learn of such visitors what they have to give of spiritual truth, and, if it may be, to impart something in return. Sometimes such friends are more than passing visitors. They come to stay for a period in the *ashram* to share the life of the Brothers. A Sufi mystic and poet; a Brahman pundit; a Jain turned Christian; a Parsee merchant; an Arya-Samajist from East Africa; a Czecho-Slovakian professor; such are a few of the many interesting personages who have come to stay, for greater or lesser periods, in the *ashram*. It is one of the Brothers' greatest privileges to be brought in daily contact with such well-loved friends.

On more than one occasion a group of Hindus, mostly Brahmans, has come for a Sunday's "quiet day" at the *ashram,* spending much time in the chapel in prayer, and eagerly attentive to the addresses which were delivered; and warm has been their testimony to the help which such times can bring in the guidance and deepening of the spiritual life.

One Holy Week and Easter the Brothers were privileged to entertain, for retreat and conference, a large body of workers belonging to the National Missionary Society—a society run by Indian workers on Indian money. On great festivals the Brothers follow the Indian custom of giving a feast to poor and outcaste children. . . . .

But the day hastens to its close. The garden work is ended. The Brothers return, if possible, from their outside labours by the hour of sunset, when once again all gather for the worship of the evening *sandhya.* Some of the visitors remain to share the worship. On a bridge not far away a group of students sits to listen to the *bhajans.* The bell of the *Angelus* is sounded, and once again there is the offering of prayer and hymn and long silent adoration in the gathering dusk, closing in the final benediction of peace.

(2) *The Students' Hostel.*

One of the most important "works" of the Sangha is the students' hostel. Poona, as we saw above, is a centre of student life. Its colleges

attract enormous numbers of young men between the ages of eighteen and twenty-four, and most of these have to find lodgings in the city, for the hostels connected with the colleges cannot accommodate more than a small percentage of the students. The conditions of city lodgings are good neither for soul nor body. Sanitation is poor. There is much fever. At times plague breaks out. There are also many temptations in the city for young men just freed from the restraints of home and school life.

In these circumstances it became clear that the Sangha would be performing an important piece of public service if it could start a hostel for some of these college students, where they would be able to live under decent conditions and a sufficient, if not over-rigorous, discipline.

In the autumn of 1928, as was noted in the last chapter, the hostel was started in a couple of rented bungalows half a mile from the *ashram*. At once there was a rush of applications from students asking to come. In a few days the hostel was full up with a waiting list. A third bungalow in the same compound has now been added, and about twenty students in all can be accommodated. They are an extraordinarily mixed lot—Christians, Hindus, and Moslems—and hailing from various parts of India: arts students and students of law, agriculture and engineering. But all are one family, and all interdine. This is sacramental, and testifies to the determination to break down those barriers of

community and caste which have so held India in bondage. Some of the Hindus have themselves been most forward in insisting on this common "mess."

The *garage* upon the compound has been turned into a beautiful little chapel, very simply decorated with some lovely blue hangings, a crucifix, and some pictures—all the gifts of friends. Here there is a daily eucharist, and prayers at other times of the day. The Christian students come to chapel each morning at 6.30 and each evening at 9.45; and to each of these Christians in the hostel the Brothers try to give an hour a week individually for Bible study and Christian teaching.

The Brothers do not desire to force their religion on the non-Christian students; but many of these also are of their own accord coming to them for spiritual guidance and moral help. Many are the talks on religion and the spiritual life; and on every Sunday morning there is a brief service with an address for all who like to come.

There are other activities that centre in this hostel of the Sangha. The Literary Society meets each Saturday, when lectures on a variety of general subjects are delivered. Games are a feature of the hostel life, and sometimes an outing is arranged to some place of interest. Two Bible circles are arranged for Christian students. These are not confined to the hostel students, but are open to all who care to come, and include women students in their membership.

But the Brothers have always desired that the outstanding note of the hostel life should be service; it is, therefore, a matter of special joy to them that the hostel students themselves run two night schools for poor children. One is in Urdu, for the children of the Mohammedan servants. The other is in Marathi, for the children of "untouchable" outcaste folk at the hostel's very doors.

Such are some of the activities of the hostel. The Brothers hope that some day they may be able to build a student hostel of their own, better suited to their needs than the present hired bungalows.

(3) *Work in the Villages.*

India is a land of villages. Those who know only the town have not seen the real India. The peasant farmers, living in innumerable country towns and hamlets, and forming from 70 to 80 per cent. of the whole people, are still the true backbone of the land.

Christa Seva Sangha (as we have seen) started its work in the villages; and, though for a while its village work was in abeyance during the erection of the *ashram* in Poona and the first building up of the *ashram* life, it is now being resumed again. For the Brothers realize that, if they work only among the educated people of the town and ignore the poor of the country, they will inevitably grow partial and one-sided in their outlook and service.

In the closing months of 1929 a party of Brothers, setting out from Poona, revisited the

scenes of their early labours in Karanji and the district around; and in the hot weather (March to May) of 1930 a similar body toured in the district near Poona, seeking opportunities of initiating a work of village uplift (in which one of their number has had expert training); lecturing on hygiene, sanitation, and child-welfare in various village centres; and expounding, through *bhajans* and preaching, to those willing to hear of it, the message of Christ as the true moral dynamic for the highest and most permanent uplift.

The Brothers hope that they may be able to find, in the neighbourhood of Poona, a suitable centre in which to found a village *ashram,* where a few of the Brothers can live permanently—with a true simplicity, such as the conditions of town life make difficult—and others from Poona join them from time to time. Such a Christian *ashram* would be a place of service to the village people—a home where the peasants would be welcomed as friends, and whose purpose would be to assist, by whatever ways might open, and with the people's own co-operation, the whole physical, moral, and spiritual betterment of the village life. The establishment of such a village *ashram* would seem to be the next advance towards which God is leading the Brothers of Christa Seva Sangha.

EPILOGUE.

It is drawing towards the evening of Christmas Day. The shadows are lengthening across the *ashram* court, which is filled with a motley assembly of men and women, some seated upon chairs and rough benches, others squatting upon the ground, all facing towards the central doorway of the *math,* where a rough white curtain hangs, screening that part of the verandah as for a stage.

In the front of the company a party of singers and instrumentalists, seated on the ground, beguiles the time of waiting with a number of Marathi *bhajans,* while the people assemble. The audience is strangely mixed. Here are many Hindu friends of the Sangha—college professors and college students, schoolmasters and pleaders, merchants and men of business. Here are Moslems and Parsees; members of the Theosophical Society, and the Prarthanā Samāj[1], and the Servants of India Society; all glad to show their friendship to the Sangha, and their reverence to the Christ of Bethlehem, by coming to witness the drama of his nativity which the Brothers have prepared for this Christmas festival. Here, too, are Indian Christians

1. A theistic reforming society.

of various denominations—men, women, and children; and English Christians—mostly missionaries, among them the Superior General of the Society of St. John the Evangelist.

The music ceases, and the Acharya, vested in alb and cope, comes forward from the curtains and explains briefly the scenes that are about to be witnessed. The curtain is drawn, revealing the prophet Isaiah, an imposing white-bearded figure, who proclaims from the scroll of his prophecy the coming redemption and the coming Herald. "Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people, saith your God" . . . . "The voice of one crying in the wilderness, prepare ye the way of the Lord: make his paths straight." . . . .

The prophet ushers on the Herald, the Forerunner. A strange, ascetic figure, with rough and hairy mantle; one shoulder bared; the skin of his face and arms and legs tanned by the desert sun; his locks and beard grown long. He passes slowly across the stage, and down the steps, and out into the desert. There follow the simple scenes of the great wonder of Bethlehem; the pure Virgin of Nazareth, and Gabriel bringing the great tidings; the shepherds in the field, keeping watch over their flocks by night; the vision of the heavenly messenger; the rough stable, with Joseph and Mary and the Holy Child; the coming of the shepherds, and their wondering adoration.

Each scene is heralded by the singing of some suitable hymn, and by the passage of Scripture

describing it, read by the Acharya. Of scenery and scenic "properties" there is none. All is utter simplicity, and for the most part in dumb show. The parts of Gabriel, Isaiah, and John the Baptist are acted by English Brothers, the rest by Indian. An Indian Brother in a simple *sari* takes the part of the Blessed Virgin, and no sense of incongruity is felt. She sings *Magnificat* in its Marathi setting, and later an Indian lullaby to her Child, who is not shown himself, but only the rough wooden box which serves for cradle. The shepherds are dressed in the rough garb of the Indian shepherd. One young lad, bearing around his neck a lamb to offer at the manger, acts with a perfect naturalness of unstudied art that recalls the religious drama of mediæval times.

Last of all come the Wise Men, striking and symbolic figures, approaching with measured pace, one by one, from different sides of the court, as it were by different paths which meet in Bethlehem—a Zoroastrian, sumptuously clad, who offers his gold with a salutation spoken in Persian; a Buddhist monk in his orange robe who greets the Christ Child in Pali, as he sets the incense before him; a Brahman, in the garb of his caste, who with the utterance of a Sanskrit verse lays his myrrh at the feet of the Infant Saviour. So shall they come, "from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south."

The brief drama is ended. The Acharya comes forward at the close. "Friends," he says, "who

have come hither at our invitation to witness our simple play of the Christ Child; we have tried to set before you, with crude and homely art, the most wonderful story in all the world—the story of how God became a little Child." He shows how this wondrous way of Love's humility was the one sure way of gaining an entrance into the stubborn hearts of men, since none can resist the appeal of a little child.

Angels, Wise Men, and shepherds gather round the central group of Joseph and Mary and the Holy Child, and join together with the choir in the singing of *Adeste Fideles*. As the last verse begins, all bend low in reverent homage before the rough cradle, and the hearts of many in that strangely assorted throng bend with them, profoundly stirred.

Yea, Lord, we greet thee,
Born this happy morning;
Jesu, to thee be glory given!
Word of the Father,
Now in flesh appearing!
O come, let us adore him,
Christ the Lord!

APPENDIX.

Our readers may be interested to see the following translations of the *Rising Prayers* used by the Brothers (adapted from the Sanskrit *Rising Prayers* of the Hindus), and the *Prayer of the Protection* (adapted from the compline of the Jacobite Syrians in Travancore), which is the closing benediction of the day.

I.

Rising Prayers.

May God, the Lord of night and day, grant us a prosperous dawn, and may all the angels of God protect us!

Lord Christ, all-adorable *Guru*, the nectar of whose teaching bringeth to naught the poison of the world; at thy feet we fall in prostrate homage!

* * * *

The Lord hath created us to be one with himself, who is Reality, Mind, Bliss; freed for ever from grief and fear.

* * * *

Lord Jesu Christ, Lord of the world, living God! At thy bidding we rise, and for the love of thee set forth on this day's pilgrimage. We know the right, but we cleave not to it; we know the wrong, but we turn not from it.

O thou that dwellest in our hearts, grant us grace to live this day according to thy will.

II.

THE PRAYER OF THE PROTECTION.

PEOPLE: Lord, grant thy blessing!

PRIEST (*with the Cross uplifted, and facing the people*): May the Cross of the Son of God, who is mightier than all the hosts of Satan, and more glorious than all the angels of heaven, abide with us in our going out and our coming in! By day and by night, at morning and at evening, at all times and in all places, may it protect and defend us! From the wrath of evil men, from the assaults of evil spirits, from foes visible and invisible, from the snares of the devil, from all low passions that beguile the soul and body, may it guard, protect, and deliver us!

PEOPLE: Lord, grant thy blessing!

PRIEST: In the glorious, protecting, and life-giving Cross be your defence!

PEOPLE: Lord, grant thy blessing!

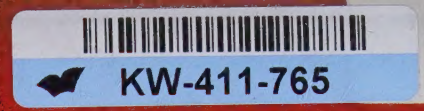
PRIEST: May the Lord of heaven and earth vouchsafe you his blessing! May the Lord bless each one that hath partaken in this worship, and grant him forgiveness of his sins; and grant forgiveness to all the faithful departed.

Then, turning towards the altar, he says:

And, O Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, may these our weak and faltering prayers find acceptance at thine altar in heaven, now and always.

5m/2-25196

London
H. B. Skinner & Co.,
124/6 Denmark Hill, S.E. 5


KW-411-765